DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 322 048 SO 030 077

AUTHOR Cushner, Kenneth
TITLE Evaluating a Culture-General Assimilator through the Orientation of AFS Students to New Zealand.
INSTITUTION AFS International/Intercultural Programs, Inc., New York, NY. Center for the Study of Intercultural Learning.
REPORT NO AFS-RR-34
PUB DATE Dec 87
NOTE 19p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Acculturation; *Adolescents; *Cross Cultural Training; Cultural Pluralism; Educational Research; *Exchange Programs; Foreign Countries; Foreign Culture; Higher Education; High School Students; Intercultural Communication; Intercultural Programs; International Organizations; International Programs; Multicultural Education; Research Reports
IDENTIFIERS *New Zealand

ABSTRACT

Designed to assess the impact of an approach to aid assimilation of exchange students from a number of different countries into a wide variety of cultures, this study looked at the adjustment of adolescent exchange students who lived in New Zealand for a year. A culture-general assimilator in the form of a programmed textbook was used to introduce concepts relevant to intercultural interaction and adjustment. Unlike other assimilators that have typically been culture-specific, the culture-general format used in this study was designed to introduce individuals to relevant issues in intercultural interaction and adjustment regardless of the cultural groups involved. It was found that students trained with the culture-general assimilator were better able to identify dynamics that mediated cross-cultural interaction and the process of adjustment, and to apply concepts of cross-cultural interaction and adjustment to their own descriptions of intercultural misunderstandings they had experienced. It was concluded that there were valid culture-general concepts as well as methods of presenting them that had a positive impact on the adjustment and interaction of sojourners. (DB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

50

Evaluating a Culture-General Assimilator through the Orientation of AFS Students to New Zealand

ED322048

by Kenneth Cushner

AFS RESEARCH REPORT 34

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

C. L. GROVE

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

SO 030 077

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The AFS Center for the Study of Intercultural Learning

MISSIONS OF THE AFS CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF INTERCULTURAL LEARNING

The two missions of The AFS Center for the Study of Intercultural Learning are:

1. To cooperate with educators, trainers, researchers, scholars, and other professionals around the world in ways that promote the Center's positive reputation, and therefore that of AFS Intercultural Programs, as a leader in the discovery, collection, and dissemination of knowledge regarding intercultural learning. Such cooperation should involve

    a. carrying out projects of research and evaluation that hold potential for increasing knowledge regarding the theory and practice of all types of intercultural learning;

    b. collecting and developing innovative cross-cultural orientation materials and procedures that hold potential for increasing the intercultural learning and personal effectiveness of people involved in contact across cultures;

    c. writing or editing, and publishing or causing to be published, printed materials of all kinds pertaining to the theory and practice of intercultural learning;

    d. collecting and cataloguing printed materials from a wide range of sources pertaining to intercultural learning, cross-cultural research, area studies, global awareness education, and related fields;

    e. leading or otherwise contributing actively to professional associations and special events dedicated to the promotion of understanding of intercultural learning or other issues related to intercultural contact, and to the dissemination of knowledge about the same.

2. To cooperate with staff members and volunteers associated with AFS Intercultural Programs around the world in ways that help them increase their abilities to enhance the intercultural learning of AFS participants of all types, to promote and improve AFS programs and operations, and to develop new programs. Such cooperation should involve

    a. keeping AFS staff and volunteers informed about developments in the theory and practice of intercultural learning, cross-cultural orientation, and related fields, as these become known to the Center's staff in the course of carrying out its first mission;

    b. finding ways in which AFS staff and volunteers may be able to participate more fully in professional associations and special events dedicated to the promotion of understanding of intercultural learning or other issues related to intercultural contact;

    c. assisting AFS staff and volunteers, or working on their behalf, to carry out projects of research and evaluation, to develop orientation materials and procedures, and to perform other tasks involving social scientific methods or knowledge, for the benefit and advancement of AFS Intercultural Programs, AFS national units, and/or AFS constituents.

AFS/CSIL, 313 East 43rd Street, New York, New York 10017, U.S.A.

Evaluating a Culture-General Assimilator through the Orientation of AFS Students to New Zealand

by Kenneth Cushner
College of Education, Kent State University, Kent, Ohio
(formerly of the East-West Center, Honolulu, Hawaii)

December 1987

Introduction

Exchange organizations such as AFS Intercultural Programs send students from a wide variety of countries to a wide variety of destinations. Developing culture-specific orientation materials for all the possible combinations of national and cultural groups that could conceivably interact is expecting too much. An effective culture-general approach is more likely to be attainable and have widespread application.

With this in mind, this study set out to assess the impact of a recently developed culture-general assimilator on the adjustment of a group of adolescent AFS exchange students who were to live in New Zealand for one year. The culture assimilator is a training technique in the form of a programmed textbook that is designed to introduce concepts relevant to intercultural interaction and adjustment. Typically, assimilators have been published in culture-specific formats that present trainees with information concerning one particular culture or target group. The culture-general format of the assimilator used in this study, however, was designed to introduce individuals to issues found to be relevant in intercultural interaction and adjustment regardless of the cultural groups involved.

The Culture-General Assimilator

The culture-general assimilator, recently published under the title *Intercultural Interactions: A Practical Guide* (Brislin et al., 1986), presents 100 critical incidents that form the basic method of introducing trainees to 18 culture-general themes found to be of common concern to sojourners regardless of their destination or role in their host country. These themes can be organized under three broad categories:

(A) People's Intense Feelings,
(B) Knowledge Areas,
(C) Bases of Cultural Differences.

A. PEOPLE'S INTENSE FEELINGS

Experiences that cause intense feelings and that engage people's emotions.

1. *Anxiety*. Concern about whether one's behavior is appropriate.
2. *Disconfirmed Expectations*. Becoming upset because the actual situation differs from that which was expected.
3. *Belonging*. Wanting to feel accepted by others but having the status of an outsider.
4. *Ambiguity*. Difficulty in formulating appropriate behavior in another culture due to the ambiguous stimuli one receives.
5. *Confrontation With One's Prejudices*. Treating "different others" with reserve because such reactions were learned as socially desirable.

B. KNOWLEDGE AREAS

Knowledge and skills over which difficulties and misunderstandings commonly arise.

6. *Work*. Differences in attitudes toward work and the proper relationship between on-task effort and social interaction.
7. *Time and Space*. Concepts of proper temporal and spatial orientation for different interpersonal encounters.
8. *Language*. Differences in attitudes toward language use and the difficulties of learning language as actually spoken and as "read from a book."
9. *Roles*. Differences in role expectations (for example, male-female, child-adult) from culture to culture.
10. *Value of the Group Versus the Individual*. Differences reflected in such concepts as morale, loyalty, and individual achievement.
11. *Rituals and Superstitions*. Differences in how the same behavior is viewed: intelligent practices versus mere superstitions.
12. *Hierarchies: Class and Status*. The relative importance of class distinctions and the markers of high versus low status.
13. *Values*. People's predispositions to attempt to attain or avoid certain end-states.

C. BASES OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Ways of thinking about and evaluating information.

14. *Categorization*. The tendency of culturally different people to place the same individual elements into different categories.

15. *Differentiation*. The extent to which additional information is differentiated within a given knowledge area.
16. *Ingroup-Outgroup Distinctions*. The extent to which outgroup members can and cannot participate in ingroup behaviors.
17. *Learning Styles*. The styles and practices by which people are accustomed to learning.
18. *Attribution*. The bases of the judgments made about the "causes" of others' behaviors.

A modified version of the culture-general assimilator (Cushner & AFS, 1985), designed for use with an adolescent population of sojourners, was field-tested in this study. Of the 100 critical incidents, 38 were modified slightly to be congruent with the expectations and experiences of adolescents; the instrument as a whole was organized in such a manner as to make it easy to use during a relatively short post-arrival weekend orientation.

Examples of two critical incidents from the culture-general assimilator follow. In a training program, participants begin by reading an incident such as that presented in Example 1 below. They then consider the question posed at the end of the incident and determine the extent (if any) to which each of four or five alternative answers is correct. This can be accomplished either individually or in small groups where discussion is encouraged and consensus sought.

EXAMPLE 1
Informal Gatherings of People

After six months in the United States, Fumio, from Japan, seemed to be adjusting well to his schoolwork. He had satisfactory relations with his teachers, interacted frequently with other students between classes and at lunchtime, and was happy with his host family arrangements in the community. Fumio's mathematical knowledge was so good that teachers recommended that certain American students should consult him for help. He seemed to be excluded, however, from at least one type of activity in which many of the other American students participated: informal gathering of students at weekend events such as parties and sporting competitions. People did not stop to invite him to these gatherings. Since he was not invited, Fumio felt uncomfortable about simply showing up. Fumio wondered if the lack of an invitation should be interpreted as a sign that he was doing something wrong or that he was offending the American students in some way.

What is a good analysis of the situation involving the lack of invitations to the weekend gatherings?

1. The Americans were rude in not inviting Fumio, a guest in their country, to weekend social events.
2. The weekend gatherings were meant to be activities in which people who were very familiar with each other (an ingroup) could get together and relax on a very informal basis.
3. Japanese rarely go to social events. Realizing this, the Americans did not invite Fumio.
4. The Americans resented the fact that Fumio knew more mathematics than they did and felt inferior because they had to ask Fumio for help.
5. Weekend social events are largely based on specific pairings of males with females. Since Fumio was not dating anyone, he was not invited.

After reading the incident and considering all five alternative explanations, the participants are provided with a discussion of the explanation that was chosen. (If the first explanation was chosen as most nearly correct, the first discussion or "rationale" is read, and so forth.) Some of these discussions conclude by directing the participants to go back and select another, better, explanation.

Rationales

1. While in an ideal world people would be extremely sensitive to each other and would make sure they had invitations to participate in such gatherings, people's busy schedules mean that social niceties are not followed to the ultimate level. It is doubtful that the Americans wanted to be rude; the nature of these gatherings is such that the Americans might have felt that Fumio would have been uncomfortable if he actually participated. Please choose again.
2. This is the best response. There are often activities within a culture that are meant for the ingroup, a number of people very familiar with each other. The purpose of the gatherings is relaxation: People tell jokes based on shared experiences in the culture, do not have to impress each other since they already are familiar with the group's members, and generally relieve tensions after a busy week. Fumio would interfere slightly with these purposes: He would not be able to understand the points of the jokes, he is not well enough known to everyone to contribute to the relaxed atmosphere, and so on. Good questions to ask when you are sojourning in another culture are, "Is this an activity in which only ingroup members regularly participate? How often do such ingroups include sojourners,

even those sojourners in a country for more than two or three years? If there are such activities, is it realistic for me to be insulted if I am not included?"

3. There is no indication that this is the case. Please choose again.
4. While jealousy of a peer who performs well is always a possibility, ill-feelings of American students toward those from other countries is not common enough to constitute a likely explanation here. Just because the Americans ask for help does not mean that they will be resentful of the help received. Please choose again.
5. Weekend gatherings of this type are not necessarily (or even frequently) based on specific pairings of males and females. The fact that Fumio has no girlfriend is irrelevant here. Please choose again.

After reading and responding to additional incidents that help develop the concept being examined, the participants gain more information by reading an essay that examines the theme common to the incidents in the section they have been working on (in this case, the concept of ingroups and outgroups. They then progress tb another concept by reading another incident, such as the following.

EXAMPLE 2
The Rock Concert

Judy is a 15-year-old U.S. high school student spending a month in Mexico as a part of an international living program. She lives with a middle-class Mexican family and has become a good friend of the 14 year-old daughter, Rosa, and Rosa's circle of girlfriends. Judy finds life in Mexico interesting because of the novelty of the situation but feels a little frustrated at the restricted range of activities she is permitted in comparison with her life back home. She was thus excited to learn that a popular American rock group was going to play in the city next week and suggested to Rosa and her friends that they should all go. Although they admitted that they would like to go, Rosa and her friends looked very apprehensive and said they could never get permission to attend such an event. Judy then proposed that they should pretend to visit someone else and sneak off to the concert. The group refused even to consider the idea, and Judy concluded that they were a very unadventurous lot.

What is the source of the Mexican girls' reluctance to consider Judy's proposal?

1. They are much more conscious of conforming to social norms than Judy.
2. They resent Judy (a foreigner) trying to tell them what to do.
3. They do not really want to go to the rock concert and are just making excuses so as not to offend Judy.

4. They are scared of what might happen at the concert but do not wish to admit their fear.

After selecting their preferred alternative, students read the appropriate explanation or "rationale" and make another selection if directed to do so.

Rationales

1. This is the most probable explanation. In Latin cultures the socialization of children is strictly controlled (especially for girls), and they learn early the value and necessity of conforming to social norms. Behavior that might be viewed in more individualistic (and less conforming) societies as simply adventurous or explorative is regarded in conforming societies with apprehension and as potentially disruptive of the close, interdependent network. Rebelliousness or delinquency amongst the young is thus rare in such societies. The Mexican girls are thus much more conscious than Judy of the need to adhere strictly to social norms of expected behavior, and they fear dire consequences and shame if they do not. Sojourners should be aware of the social pressures to conform in such cultures and should not place hosts in situations where they are asked to go against social norms.
2. There is little indication that this is the case. They seem to accept Judy as part of their group and while they may not be willing to take up her suggestions, they do explanation. Please choose again.
3. This seems unlikely. The girls are probably as interested in rock music as Judy and probably would not see the need to fabricate excuses to Judy if they were not interested. There is a better explanation. Please choose again.
4. The girls are not afraid so much of what might happen at the concert as the consequences of what might happen if it is found out that they did attend. There is a more probable explanation. Please choose again.

Students find the critical incidents engaging because they present real-life situations through characters, setting, and story line. Readers are eager to know what happened to the characters and why.

It should be noted that even though each incident takes place within a particular country and involves interaction between people from particular cultures, the points raised in each are applicable to many sojourners, regardless of their destination. For instance, the first incident introduces the concept of ingroups and outgroups. Ingroups are a universal phenomenon. They consist of individuals who perceive them-

selves to be closely related or connected. Individuals identify with their ingroups. On the other hand, an individual's outgroup consists of people one tends to avoid or even deliberately chooses to avoid. Outgroup members may sometimes be the target of extreme prejudice by ingroup members. In an orientation session focusing on ingroups and outgroups, discussion might focus first on the participants' own ingroups and the characteristics of ingroup members, how they treat members of outgroups, and the process by which they admit outgroup people into their ingroup. Discussion might then focus on the expectations of sojourners regarding ingroup-outgroup membership in their host country.

The second incident introduces the concept of the value of the group versus the value of the individual. Useful discussion topics include the identity and nature of reference groups that might be of importance in a particular host country and the manner in which reference group members are socialized in that host country.

The Evaluation Study

In 1986, AFS New Zealand hosted approximately 145 adolescent students from 17 countries. The subjects for this study were 50 students from 14 countries. These students were hosted in the northern two thirds of the North Island, and all were fluent or nearly fluent in English. The treatment group (those from among the 50 who received training using the culture-general assimilator) comprised 28 students; the control group (which did not receive training using the culture-general assimilator) consisted of the remaining 22 students.

The 50 students came together at two weekend orientation sessions occurring three and five weeks after the students' arrival. Those in the treatment group attended four training sessions of an hour and a half each in which the culture-general assimilator was presented. During each of the four sessions, students were first introduced to a general concept (e.g., emotional reactions during adjustment), after which they read and discussed one or two critical incidents as a large group. Small groups of students then read three related critical incidents and personalized the concept by discussing it in relation to their own experiences in New Zealand. A large group discussion introduced students to relevant concepts from social and cross-cultural psychology. The students also were encouraged to read an accompanying essay on their own time.

Control group students spent this time in separate discussion groups following the typical guidelines of AFS New Zealand. These four sessions, each also of an hour and a half in length, consisted of informal discussions on these topics: (1) Who Am I? (2) Hopes and Fears, (3) New Zealand Home and Family Life, and (4) Adjustment. While the content of each discussion was meant to be the same, little effort was made to assure that students in each group (typically six students) received exactly the same content. Rather, individual's experiences and queries often became the focus of each session. Group leaders were recent returnees or parent volunteers.

To determine the effectiveness of the culture-general assimilator, treatment and control groups were compared for differences on the following six measures:

1. Ability to choose the correct response to 10 difficult critical incidents, previously unseen.
2. Ability to describe and analyze a personal cross-cultural misunderstanding, using six criteria: (1) ability to report a cross-cultural encounter; (2) demonstration of an understanding that a two-way difference exists; (3) expression of insight into self; (4) demonstration of improved understanding of an aspect of one's own culture; (5) willingness to accept a challenge to one's preconceived ideas; and (6) ability to report an incident focusing on "no-prop" concerns. ("Prop" refers to something tangible or objective such as food or use of language; "no-prop" refers to something intangible or subjective such as a relationship or humor. No-prop was scored higher in the rating scheme that was employed.)
3. Level of adjustment as measured by responses on the Culture Shock Adjustment Inventory (CSAI), a 37-item instrument designed by Juffer (1982) that places subjects on a continuum from severely culturally shocked to successfully culturally adapted. The CSAI has four subscales: (1) perceived control of the environment (CE Scale), (2) perceived compatibility with others in the host country (GA Scale), (3) self-assessed emotional well-being (E Scale), and (4) perceived physical well-being, health, and safety concerns (P Scale).
4. Problem-solving strategies as measured on a Means-End Problem Solving (MEPS) test adapted from Spivak, Platt, and Shure (1976). Spivak, Platt, and Shure refer to the most significant interpersonal problem-solving skill associated with social adjustment as means-ends problem solving. Means-ends thinking refers to the ability of an individual to identify possible means for solving problems, to predict potential obstacles and means of circumventing them, and to realize that, to a certain extent, time is required for problem resolution. In the MEPS test, subjects are presented with the beginning of a story in which some need is aroused, then with the end of the story, at which point the need is resolved. Subjects are asked to

provide the middle portion of the story, which is scored for number of means, number of obstacles, and recognition of the passage of time. In this study, scoring also took into account application of cultural knowledge (including recognition of the need to adjust to the perspective of another, awareness of a cultural faux-pas, and -- scored negatively -- displaying an ethnocentric perspective) and action orientation (taking the initiative and being responsible for resolving the problem).

5. Cross-cultural sensitivity as measured on the Inventory of Cross-Cultural Sensitivity (ICCS), a 32-item instrument designed to assess relative levels of cross-cultural sensitivity and experience. The ICCS has five subscales: (1) cultural integration, (2) behavioral response, (3) intellectual interaction, (4) attitude toward others, and (5) empathy.
6. Adjustment as determined by responses of self, host parents, and teacher on rating instruments designed to assess objective and subjective components of adjustment.

Results and Discussion

Immediately after training, differences were found on the first two measures between the group of students trained with the culture-general assimilator and those who received the normal AFS orientation:

1. Individuals trained with the culture-general assimilator were better able to identify dynamics that mediate cross-cultural interaction and the process of adjustment, as indicated by their ability to select proper responses to 10 difficult critical incidents. (Treatment and control groups differed significantly with less than 5% probability of measurement error.)
2. Individuals trained with the culture-general assimilator were better able to apply concepts of cross-cultural interaction and adjustment to their own descriptions of intercultural misunderstandings they had experienced, and tended to apply more culture-related explanations to the problems they encountered. (Treatment and control groups differed significantly with less than 5% probability for measurement error.)

The goal of the culture-general assimilator is to improve sojourners' abilities to adjust to the demands of an intercultural sojourn, first by increasing awareness and understanding of concepts of intercultural interaction and adjustment, and second by encouraging the integration of these concepts into their daily interactions with host na-

tionals. Trained individuals, as demonstrated by the above results, were more knowledgeable about concepts and issues related to cross-cultural adjustment and interaction and were better able to describe and analyze their own cross-cultural misunderstandings. These facts suggest that trained individuals used higher level cognitive processes when asked to reflect upon their own experiences than did the members of the control group.

Three months later, additional tests were conducted to compare the abilities of the two groups. In testing for the third measure, it was found that individuals trained with the culture-general assimilator were better adjusted to their immediate environment according to the results of the "CE" (perceived control of the environment) subscale of the Culture Shock Adjustment Inventory (CSAI). No significant differences were found on the remaining three subscales although a trend toward a positive change was noted on the "GA" scale (perceived compatibility with others) and the "P" scale (physical well-being, safety and health) as well as on the total CSAI score.

Six months into the experience, a new assessment showed that those trained with the culture-general assimilator were better able to articulate the steps involved in solving interpersonal problems as determined by their responses on the Means-Ends Problem Solving (MEPS) test. Results of this investigation also suggested that the trained individuals, in comparison with the untrained ones, applied more knowledge of cross-cultural concepts during their problem-solving acts and were more apt to take the initiative when confronted with an interpersonal problem.

An ultimate goal of cross-cultural training is to facilitate adjustment to a new setting by equipping individuals with the ability to identify potential problem situations and to solve those problems in a culturally-appropriate manner. Taken together, these last two findings reported above suggest that trainees are in better control of their immediate environment and feel more confidence in their abilities to interact and solve problems with hosts. The MEPS analysis looked particularly at the social problem-solving abilities of individuals and revealed a significant difference in favor of the trained students. In addition, aspects of the MEPS analysis that related particularly to application of cultural factors and action orientation indicated a marked difference in the ability of treatment group members to apply those factors to the presented problem situations. While the difference was not statistically significant, there was a tendency for treatment group members to apply cultural knowledge to the situation, and to take the initiative in solving their problems more often than control group members. Trained individuals, it could be argued, demonstrated more creativity as they employed another, higher order cognitive skill synthesis. It is the creative mind that

can perceive relationships and bring diverse elements together to address problem situations. In the present case, individuals were required to combine previously unrelated concepts or skills into new, creative patterns. Problem-solving may require such an act since often the most effective solution to a problem is found through the creative integration and application of apparently unrelated components.

When tested three months after the orientation, no significant differences were found on the fifth and sixth measures, the Inventory of Cross-Cultural Sensitivity (ICCS) and the self- and host-rated adjustment measures. The constructs in the ICCS -- cultural integration, behavioral response, intellectual interaction, attitude toward others, and empathy -- generally are assumed to be improved through an intercultural sojourn such as these students had in New Zealand. In retrospect, it might be unreasonable to expect to differentiate trained from untrained individuals on these dimensions after ALL of them had had three months of firsthand experience in a new culture. One might, instead, be more likely to differentiate trained from untrained individuals on these dimensions immediately following the training experience. If the ICCS was used immediately after training, the research question would be along the following lines: "How much sooner do trained versus untrained individuals attain high levels on these attributes and how does this facilitate adjustment?" Another investigation into the impact of the culture-general assimilator followed this approach and was able to differentiate trained from untrained groups on the empathy scale (Broaddus, 1986).

As for the lack of significant differences in adjustment on the self- and host-rating instruments, we should note that some problems with the validity of instruments of this sort are common and can be anticipated. Host parents and teachers, wrongly assuming that their responses reflect their success with the student, may inflate judgments on such forms. Another possibility is that a halo effect is at work. Individual raters, generally having a favorable opinion of the student in question, may tend to assign values for all possible categories that are consistent with their overall impression. It is also very possible that a ceiling effect might be operative. Group means tended to reflect an average individual rating very close to 4 (of a 1-5 range) for each group of raters. This suggests that a ceiling has been reached, leaving little room for variation.

The number of significant differences found in this study suggests that the culture-general assimilator is capable of bringing about marked improvement in individuals' knowledge about factors affecting cross-cultural interaction and adjustment as well as increased ability to adjust to the demands of an international sojourn. If the measures used in this study are reliable indicators of cognitive gain due to intercultural training, then these orientation materials appear to be quite powerful. This in

itself is important as trainers and educators seek out powerful and reliable means to introduce concepts of cross-cultural communication to students and other trainees. The results of this study suggest that culture-general assimilator training is capable of transferring large amounts of new information and concepts of a useful nature.

The culture-general assimilator can become a useful first step in introducing important concepts to those about to embark on further orientation, training, or person-to-person interaction. Learning theorists have identified the importance of prior knowledge and experience to the attainment of new information. Most people (adolescents especially) have had limited contact with people from other cultures, thus making it difficult to find a foundation of knowledge on which to build. The culture-general assimilator provides a foundation from which more sophisticated intercultural thinking can emerge, and it does so in a format that parallels the hypothesized scripted manner in which people think. As Abelson (1981) suggests, people tend to remember events in a scripted sequence as they were played out in their experience, not as the list of "Dos and Don'ts" so often outlined in informational presentations. The critical-incident format presents real-life experiences in the form of short scripts that are easy to recall, making it easy for trainees to integrate the experience as their own. Further learning can then develop from this starting point. In this regard, the culture-general assimilator addresses the manner in which people learn about culture and cultural differences.

Hammer, Gudykunst, and Wiseman proposed three dimensions of intercultural effectiveness: (1) the ability to deal with psychological stress, (2) the ability to communicate effectively, and (3) the ability to develop interpersonal relationships. At least two of these three dimensions seem to be enhanced by culture-general assimilator training. If the Culture Shock Adjustment Inventory (CSAI) can be assumed to be a valid assessment of the relative amount of stress experienced by a sojourner, then the ability to deal with psychological stress (one of the three dimensions) appears to be strengthened. The significant results on the inventory's CE subscale and the positive indications on two of the three remaining subscales support this suggestion.

The ability to communicate effectively, another of the three dimensions identified by Hammer, Gudykunst, and Wiseman, also appears to be positively influenced by culture-general assimilator training. Communication generally refers to the ability of one individual to effectively transmit certain information to another. Trained subjects demonstrated greater knowledge and application of cross-cultural communication and adjustment concepts to their everyday observations and problem-solving situations. It must be assumed that those who demonstrated greater knowledge of and

ability to apply those concepts also were better able to communicate with others as they now had a body of knowledge, concepts, and vocabulary with which to relate. It is suggested that as a result of training, individuals have in their minds more highly-differentiated categories than previously existed. They are now able to perceive the world through these new filters, which help to explain others' behaviors, perspectives, and experiences. Having these more highly refined categories also enables one to inquire about specifics instead of responding with uncertainty and confusion in puzzling situations, thus providing for clearer communication between sojourners and hosts.

International and cross-cultural experiences have a quality of uncertainty and difference about them. Researchers have consistently tried to identify personality characteristics and traits that facilitate intercultural communication and adjustment. One characteristic found among well-adjusted individuals has been labeled a "tolerance for ambiguity," i.e., the ability to make decisions and take action even in uncertain situations where the cues and stimuli are not all known.

The fact that trained individuals in this study demonstrated greater perceived control of their environment, coupled with the tendency they showed to take the initiative in problem-solving situations, suggests that those having greater knowledge of relevant concepts are also better able to act in ambiguous situations. This certainly is a trait worth developing in sojourners, who face new and unfamiliar situations throughout their experience.

Finally, during any student exchange experience there is the possibility, due to a wide variety of reasons (illness, job transfer, incompatibility, and so forth), that a student will have to change host families or return home early. Throughout the term of this study, 4 of the 28 subjects (14.3%) from the treatment group changed families due to incompatibility and communication problems while 6 of the 22 subjects (27.3%) from the control group required family changes for similar reasons. While not statistically significant, this difference does hint at an unanticipated outcome of training, that trained individuals have fewer adjustment difficulties that necessitate intensive intervention (such as early return or host family change).

Conclusions

Increasing numbers of individuals are embarking on sojourns to numerous destinations each year through school exchange programs, university year-abroad opportunities, business assignments, and independent travel. Even individuals who never leave their home shores are increasingly coming into contact with people from foreign homelands as tourism increases, refugee and immigrant populations continue to expand, and businesses increasingly nurture contacts within other countries. And among citizens of the same nation, culturally different groups come into increased contact through travel and migration as well as through school desegregation and neighborhood integration efforts. People must be prepared for the intercultural interactions they will most certainly encounter.

The results of this study indicate that there are indeed relevant culture-general concepts as well as methods of presenting them that have a positive impact on the adjustment and interaction of sojourners. With this fact in mind, organizations sending individuals to diverse destinations might benefit by using the concepts introduced in the culture-general assimilator as a common core from which a great number of orientation programs can be developed. And while the assimilator used in this study has demonstrated that it is powerful in its own right, efforts should continue to improve and develop it further.

Editor's Footnote

1. For a recent listing of available culture-specific assimilators, see page 206 of Rosita Albert, "Conceptual Framework for the Development and Evaluation of Cross-Cultural Orientation Programs," in *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (1986).

References

Abelson, R. "Psychological Status of the Script Concept." *American Psychologist*, Vol. 36 (1981), pp. 715-729.

Brislin, R., Cushner, K., Cherrie, C., andYong, M. *Intercultural Interactions: A Practical Guide*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1986.

Broaddus, D. *Use of the Culture-General Assimilator in Intercultural Training*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Terre Haute, IN: Indiana State University, 1986. (Available from University Microfilms International,Ann Arbor, Michigan.)

Cushner, K. *Culture-General Assimilator for Adolescent Experiences Overseas*. NewYork: AFS Intercultural Programs, 1985.

Cushner, K. *The Effect of a Culture-General Assimilator on the Adjustment of Adolescent Exchange Students Living in New Zealand*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1987. (Available from University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, Michigan.)

Hammer, M., Gudykunst, W., & Wiseman, R. "Dimensions of Intercultural Effectiveness: An Exploratory Study." *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (1978). pp. 382-393.

Juffer, K.A. "Technical Description of CSAI." Unpublished manuscript. Macomb, IL: Western Illinois University, 1982.

Ruben, B. and Kealey, D. "Behavioral Assessment of Communication Competency and the Prediction of Cross-Cultural Adaptation." *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (1979). pp. 15-47.

Spivak, C., Platt, J.J., and Shure, M. *The Problem-Solving Approach to Adjustment*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1976.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE OF AFS INTERNATIONAL

AFS volunteers and professional staff throughout the world are moving towards the goal of peace by stimulating an awareness of mankind's common humanity, a wider understanding of the diverse cultures of the world, and a concern for the global issues confronting society. They acknowledge that peace is a dynamic concept threatened by injustices both between and within nations.

In pursuit of this goal, the core of the AFS experience has been the promotion of relationships in which families, communities, groups and maturing young persons from different cultural backgrounds share new learning situations related to the purposes of AFS. In addition, through experience and experimentation, AFS has developed and continues to encourage new models and opportunities for exchange that will be beneficial for the development of society.

AFS does not affiliate with any religious, political or partisan group, but it believes in the value of participating in a continuous process of interaction between cultures both across and within boundaries.

AFS encourages all participants to involve themselves in situations in which they can apply and project their AFS experience.